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EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISJUNCTIVISM AND THE BISCOPIC TREATMENT OF RADICAL SCEPTICISM

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ABSTRACT. How should epistemological disjunctivism respond to the problem of radical scepticism? The natural way to proceed seems to be some form of neo-Moorean view, whereby one deals with the sceptical puzzle by arguing that not only can one know that one is not the victim of radical sceptical hypotheses, but moreover one can know this on the basis of reflectively accessible factive reasons that entail the falsity of such hypotheses. While I argue that such an heroic anti-sceptical line is at least defensible, I maintain that there is a much better way to go. This involves recognising the dual nature of the sceptical problem and accordingly offering a two-pronged treatment, one that allies epistemological disjunctivism to a Wittgensteinian hinge epistemology. This is what I call the *biscopic* response to radical scepticism.

1. EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISJUNCTIVISM

Epistemological disjunctivism—at least as I defend the view anyway—holds that in paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge one knows in virtue of possessing rational support which is both factive (i.e., it entails the target proposition) and reflectively accessible. In particular, it holds that one can have perceptual knowledge that p in virtue of *seeing that* p , where seeing that p is factive, and where it is reflectively accessible to one that one sees that p .¹

My interest in this paper is to determine how best to embed epistemological disjunctivism within an anti-sceptical proposal. Accordingly, in what follows I will take it as given that epistemological disjunctivism is a defensible position, and that it has been shown to be rooted in

our everyday epistemic practices, and focus instead on its anti-sceptical import. As we will see, while one can extract a particularly robust response to this problem exclusively from the philosophical resources provided by epistemological disjunctivism, I think a more nuanced approach is required, one that draws on insights from Wittgenstein. Nonetheless, let me first offer a brief overview of the view and its distinctive features.

Epistemological disjunctivism is rooted in the pioneering work of John McDowell (e.g., 1995), but our focus here will be on the specific rendering of the thesis just offered. The view is highly controversial, to the extent that I think it is fair to say that until recently it was not seriously considered at all by epistemologists, on the grounds that it was obviously false. The main reason for this was that epistemologists have generally tended to accept the so-called *new evil genius intuition* regarding the nature of one's reflectively accessible rational support. According to this intuition, since one cannot discriminate between normal (non-sceptical) conditions and parallel sceptical scenarios where one is radically deceived (e.g., as when one is a brain-in-a-vat, or 'BIV' for short), so it follows that the rational support reflectively available to one in the former scenario (the 'good' case) can be no better than the rational support reflectively available to one in the latter scenario (the 'bad' case).² If that's right, then since one clearly does not have reflectively accessible factive perceptual reasons in the bad case (for one thing, the relevant propositions are false), it follows that one cannot have reflectively accessible factive reasons in the good case either, and hence epistemological disjunctivism must be false.

Far from this line of reasoning demonstrating that epistemological disjunctivism is untenable, however, what it in fact exposes is that epistemological disjunctivism is committed to denying the new evil genius intuition. And, indeed, this is explicitly what it does.³ The basic line of thought is that we should not evaluate the scope of a subject's reflectively accessible rational support in the good case by limiting it to that reflectively accessible rational support which is available in the bad case, even though the good and bad cases are by hypothesis indistinguishable. Hence, the new evil genius intuition has to go.

Merely denying the new evil genius intuition will not suffice to make epistemological disjunctivism palatable, however. Instead, one must go further to show how the view is credible. To that end, in previous work—especially Pritchard (2012)—I have tried to argue for the following three claims. First, that epistemological disjunctivism is rooted in our ordinary epistemic practices, such that it is only in response to philosophical theorising about those practices—e.g., the sort of theorising that leads to the new evil genius intuition—that we are led to reject it. Second, that the philosophical problems that the view appears to face are entirely illusory, such that epistemological disjunctivism is at least an available position. Finally, third, that

epistemological disjunctivism is a highly desirable philosophical position (indeed, I went so far in this regard as to describe it as the ‘holy grail’ of epistemology). Moreover, since epistemological disjunctivism was already regarded as a controversial thesis, I set myself the task of arguing for these three theses without appealing to any additional philosophical claims that were controversial.

It is easy to see why epistemological disjunctivism, if true (and especially if in addition rooted in our everyday epistemic practices), would be thought to be a desirable philosophical thesis. This is because it offers something that was previously thought to be simply unavailable. On standard ways of thinking about the epistemological internalism/externalism distinction, one is faced with a stark choice. On the one hand, one can appeal to the kind of reflectively accessible rational support that satisfies the epistemic internalist rubric, but then one has to concede that this is rational support that would be possessed even if one’s beliefs were radically in error (as they would be, if one were in the bad case). In short, one gives up on one’s epistemic support gaining one any direct epistemic grip on a world that is external to one.⁴ On the other hand, one can instead appeal to the kinds of epistemic standings favoured by epistemic externalists, such as reliability and so forth. Here one is assured of this epistemic support offering one a direct epistemic grip on a world that is external to one, since it is epistemic support that one only possesses if one stands in certain objective relations to that world. But now the price that one pays is that this epistemic support is, from a rational point of view, completely opaque to one. That one’s beliefs are forming in reliable ways, for example, is not something that is reflectively accessible to one.

Epistemological disjunctivism seems to offer a very direct way of cutting the Gordian knot in this regard, for it presents a way of thinking about the epistemic support that one has in paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge such that it is both reflectively accessible and factive. This means that, like the epistemic support favoured by epistemic internalists, it is not rationally opaque, but also that this is epistemic support which, like that favoured by epistemic externalists, also offers us a direct epistemic grip on the external world (since it entails facts about that world).

A further reason why epistemological disjunctivism might be thought to be a particularly desirable position is that it seems to offer us distinctive resources to deal with the problem of radical scepticism. For if we can have reflectively accessible factive perceptual reasons, then doesn’t that mean that we possess an excellent rational basis for dismissing this problem? Moreover, if epistemological disjunctivism is indeed rooted in our everyday epistemic practices, then it seems that we are in a position to offer a compelling diagnosis of what generates the sceptical problem. In particular, rather than this puzzle arising out of a fundamental tension in our most basic epistemological commitments, which is how the difficulty is usually cast, it is instead

the result of a failure to take our everyday epistemic practices seriously, a failure that arises out of faulty philosophical reasoning.

2. DISJUNCTIVE NEO-MOOREANISM

Here is a fairly standard formulation of the problem of radical scepticism in the contemporary epistemological literature. ‘E’ refers to an instance of the kind of everyday propositions which we believe and which we take ourselves to have knowledge of, if we know anything much. It is also a proposition that is inconsistent with standard radical sceptical hypotheses, such as the BIV hypothesis. With these points in mind, we thus get the following formulation of radical scepticism:

The Closure-Based Radical Sceptical Paradox

- (S₁1) One cannot have rationally grounded knowledge that one is not a BIV.
- (S₁2) If one cannot have rationally grounded knowledge that one is not a BIV, then one cannot have rationally grounded knowledge that E.
- (S₁3) One has rationally grounded knowledge that E.⁵

The first claim is meant to be highly intuitive. Given that, *ex hypothesi*, one cannot distinguish between ordinary non-sceptical experiences and those experiences had by a BIV, how could one possibly have rationally grounded knowledge that one is not the victim of this sceptical scenario? In particular, to what would one appeal in order to motivate this claim?⁶ The third claim is also meant to be highly intuitive. Indeed, it essentially constitutes the denial of radical scepticism *qua* position (i.e., the view that we don’t have much of the knowledge that we take ourselves to have).

The force of this argument thus rests on the second claim. This isn’t held to be intuitive in itself, but is rather a bridging claim designed to bring (S₁1) and (S₁3) into conflict. Nonetheless, although this claim isn’t intuitive in its own right, it does seem to be entailed by a principle that is highly intuitive. Consider the following *closure principle* for rationally grounded knowledge:

The Closure Principle

If *S* has rationally grounded knowledge that *p*, and *S* competently deduces from *p* that *q*, thereby forming a belief that *q* on this basis while retaining her rationally grounded knowledge that *p*, then *S* has rationally grounded knowledge that *q*.

With the closure principle in play, it follows that if one did have rationally grounded knowledge that E, then one could competently deduce from this knowledge that one is not a BIV, and thereby acquire rationally grounded knowledge that one is not a BIV.⁷ Conversely, if it is already granted that one simply cannot have rationally grounded knowledge that one is not a BIV, it follows that one cannot have rationally grounded knowledge that E either. We thus get (S₁2).

The guiding thought behind the closure principle is that competent deduction is a paradigm instance of a rational process. Accordingly, any belief that is grounded on a competent deduction from rationally grounded knowledge—and where the original rationally grounded knowledge is preserved throughout the deduction—cannot be itself any less rationally grounded. There are, of course, weaker formulations of closure-style principles in this general vein in the literature, and some of them have been rejected for various reasons.⁸ But it is hard to see how one could motivate a rejection of the principle as just formulated, which is why the debate about closure-based radical scepticism is now generally targeted on this specific formulation (or, at least, a formulation in the general vicinity of this one). How could one have rationally grounded knowledge, competently deduce a belief on this basis (while retaining the original rationally grounded knowledge), and yet lack rationally grounded knowledge of the proposition deduced? At the very least, any anti-sceptical strategy that proceeds by rejecting this principle will face a steep up-hill task.

With the foregoing in mind, we can perhaps more perspicaciously formulate the radical sceptical paradox in terms of the following inconsistent triad:

*The Closure-Based Radical Sceptical Paradox**

- (S₁1*) One cannot have rationally grounded knowledge that one is not the victim of a radical sceptical hypothesis.
- (S₁2*) The Closure Principle.
- (S₁3*) One has lots of rationally grounded E-type knowledge.

Since the three claims that make up this paradox are in logical conflict with one another, we know that at least one of them must be false. But since they are all highly intuitive, it is hard to see which is to go.

How should epistemological disjunctivism respond to this puzzle? It seems like the natural way to go is to reject the opening claim, (S₁1*). This line of response to the sceptical paradox is often known in the literature as ‘neo-Moorean’, on account of the fact that it mirrors G. E. Moore’s (e.g., 1925; 1939) commonsense approach to radical scepticism in certain respects.⁹ Usually, however, neo-Moorean responses to radical scepticism proceed by arguing against (S₁1*) on epistemic externalist grounds.¹⁰ What would be distinctive about an epistemological disjunctivism neo-Moorean view (henceforth, *disjunctive neo-Mooreanism*), however, is that it would offer an *epistemic internalist* way of advancing neo-Mooreanism (albeit a non-classical version of this thesis), since the treatment of radical scepticism would be grounded in the notion of a reflectively accessible factive reason.

How might disjunctive neo-Mooreanism proceed? Well, presumably, the idea would be that one is able to competently deduce from one’s factively rationally grounded perceptual

knowledge, via a closure-based inference, that one is not the victim of a radical sceptical scenario. In this way, one can acquire rationally grounded knowledge—indeed, factively rationally grounded knowledge—of such claims as that one is not a BIV. Moreover, epistemological disjunctivism is able to tell a diagnostic story about why we were taken in by the sceptical problem. Our mistake was to buy into the faulty theoretical picture that has the new evil genius at its heart. Instead, what we should do is endorse the alternative picture offered by epistemological disjunctivism, and which is rooted in our everyday epistemic practices. According to this alternative account, we have a very straightforward way of dealing with the problem of radical scepticism. In this way, epistemological disjunctivism would be offering what is known as an *undercutting* response to the putative radical sceptical paradox, in that it would be claiming that what looks like a genuine paradox is in fact nothing of the sort, and instead rests on faulty theoretical claims that we can abandon with impunity.¹¹

Is such a response to scepticism plausible? I've argued elsewhere that one can do a fair amount of work to make it plausible. In particular, I've argued that the kinds of distinctions that one needs to draw in order to explain why epistemological disjunctivism is in general a viable position also strengthen the anti-sceptical credentials of the position. For example, one problem that faces epistemological disjunctivism—which I've christened the *distinguishability problem*—is how it can explain how on this view it is possible (in the good case) to know that one is in the good case. Epistemological disjunctivism is committed to this possibility, since there is something reflectively available to one in the good case that is not reflectively available in the bad case—i.e., factive reasons. But it is hard to see how this claim can be squared with the fact that good and bad cases are by hypothesis indistinguishable.

I argue that epistemological disjunctivism can evade this problem by appealing to a distinction that I claim all epistemologists should endorse, between favouring and discriminating epistemic support. The crux of the matter is that there can be a way of knowing that one is in one scenario rather than another, via one's possession of favouring epistemic support, which does not thereby entail that one is able to perceptually discriminate between the two scenarios at issue. With this distinction in place, epistemological disjunctivism can maintain that there can be a way of knowing that one is in the good case rather than the bad case, by appeal to the favouring epistemic support provided by the possession of the factive reason, whilst nonetheless granting that one lacks a discriminative power to tell these two scenarios apart.¹²

Applied to the sceptical problem, this manoeuvre enables epistemological disjunctivism to consistently maintain that while on this view one is in a position, in the good case, to come to acquire rationally grounded knowledge that one is not the victim of a sceptical hypothesis, this

knowledge is entirely compatible with the concession that one cannot discriminate between ordinary scenarios and their sceptical counterparts. This means that while epistemological disjunctivism is admittedly offering a rather blunt response to the problem of radical scepticism, the proposal is not quite as blunt as it might first appear. Moreover, as I've argued elsewhere, there are other philosophical resources that epistemological disjunctivism can draw on to further motivate their anti-sceptical position.¹³ The upshot is that disjunctive neo-Mooreanism is at least defensible as an anti-sceptical strategy.

Even though this anti-sceptical strategy is defensible, I do not think that it is optimal. In order to see why, however, we will need to do something that I precluded myself from doing when I first defended epistemological disjunctivism, and that is to appeal to independent philosophical theses which are also controversial (though no less true as a result).

3. THE TWO SOURCES OF SCEPTICISM

The first thing we need to do is gain a more nuanced understanding of the nature of the radical sceptical problem. The formulation of this problem that we employed above, in keeping with standard practice, is closure-based. But there is also a second formulation of this problem available in the literature, which turns on what is known as the *underdetermination principle*:

The Underdetermination-Based Radical Sceptical Paradox

- (S₂₁) One cannot have a rational basis that favours one's belief that E over the BIV scenario.
- (S₂₂) If one cannot have a rational basis that favours one's belief that E over the BIV scenario, then one lacks rationally grounded knowledge that E.
- (S₂₃) One has rationally grounded knowledge that E.¹⁴

As with the closure-based formulation of the radical sceptical paradox, these three claims are clearly in logical conflict, and hence we know that at least one of them must be false. The final claim that makes up the underdetermination-based radical sceptical paradox is identical to the final claim that makes up the closure-based radical sceptical paradox, so we can focus our attention on the other two.

The first claim, (S₂₁), captures the widely held commitment in epistemology to the so-called new evil demon intuition that we noted above. Recall that this claimed that the rational basis for one's beliefs in the good case can be no better than the rational basis for one's counterpart's beliefs in the sceptical bad case. It follows that (S₂₁) must be true, since if one did possess a rational basis that favoured one's everyday beliefs over sceptical alternatives, then that would run directly counter to the new evil demon intuition.

The second claim in the underdetermination-based formulation of radical scepticism, (S₂), is meant to be derived from the following principle:

The Underdetermination Principle

If *S* knows that *p* and *q* describe incompatible scenarios, and yet *S* lacks a rational basis that favours belief that *p* over *q*, then *S* lacks rationally grounded knowledge that *p*.

With this principle in play, it follows that if one lacks a rational basis which favours E over the BIV alternative, then one lacks rationally supported knowledge that E. We thus get (S₂).

The underdetermination principle is meant to be entirely uncontentious. Consider what it would mean for it to be false. This would entail that one could have rationally grounded knowledge of a proposition even while recognising that the proposition believed was incompatible with an alternative scenario and that one's rational basis for one's belief didn't favour it over the alternative scenario. An example might be having rationally grounded knowledge that one is seated even while recognising that one has no better reason for thinking that one is seated than that one is standing (a known to be incompatible alternative). Although there might be some dispute over what is involved in having rationally grounded knowledge, we would surely want a conception of this kind of knowledge such that it excluded this possibility.

These two formulations of the radical sceptical paradox are clearly very similar. They share a claim, and the sceptical challenge posed in each case is the same. Moreover, they can each be formulated in terms of a conflict between our rationally grounded knowledge of an everyday proposition, E, and an epistemic lack which is exposed by radical sceptical hypotheses, in this case the BIV hypothesis. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that they are widely held to be equivalent formulations of the sceptical problem.¹⁵ Crucially, however, these two formulations of the sceptical problem are in fact logically distinct, and this is because the epistemic demands made by the two epistemic principles on which they turn are subtly different.

We can evaluate the relative logical strengths of these two epistemic principles by considering, in a simplified and analogous fashion, what each principle demands in the particular case of a subject's belief that E in the context of the BIV sceptical hypothesis:

The Simplified Closure-Based Entailment

If *S* has rationally grounded knowledge that E, then *S* has rationally grounded knowledge that she is not a BIV.

The Simplified Underdetermination-Based Entailment

If *S* has rationally grounded knowledge that E, then *S* has rational support for her belief that E which favours that belief over the sceptical alternative that she is a BIV.

I take it that the simplified closure-based entailment is an obvious, and uncontentious, simplification of what the closure principle demands in this case. That the simplified

underdetermination-based entailment is a simplification of what the underdetermination principle demands is not so obvious, but that is because we are effectively working with a contraposed version of the principle. Uncontraposed, the entailment would be that if one lacks a rational basis which favours belief that E over the alternative sceptical scenario that one is a BIV, then one lacks rationally grounded knowledge that E. The reason why it is useful to work with a contraposed version of this claim is that the underdetermination-based entailment will then share its antecedent with the simplified closure-based entailment. We can thus focus our attention on what is entailed in each case.

With the entailments generated by the underdetermination and closure principles simplified in this way, we can detect one obvious difference between them. This is that whereas the simplified closure-based entailment demands that one has rationally grounded knowledge that one is *not* a BIV, the simplified underdetermination-based entailment merely demands that one has a rational basis which favours belief that E over the BIV alternative. The former claim is much more demanding than the latter claim, in that one can have better reasons for believing E rather than the BIV hypothesis without thereby possessing rationally grounded knowledge that one is *not* a BIV. In particular, while having better reason to believe that E as opposed to the BIV hypothesis plausibly entails that one has *some* reason for believing that one is not a BIV, it would be a stretch to maintain that this *by itself* entails that one has rationally grounded knowledge that one is not a BIV (even granted that the entailed belief in question will be true). There is thus a strong *prima facie* basis for arguing that the underdetermination principle is logically weaker than the closure principle, in the sense that from the same antecedent the former principle extracts a logically weaker consequent.

This point is confirmed once we reflect on the logical relationships in the other direction—*viz.*, from the closure principle to the underdetermination principle. For notice that if one has rationally grounded knowledge that E, and one thereby has rationally grounded knowledge, via the closure principle, that one is not a BIV, then of course one inevitably has a rational basis which favours E over the alternative sceptical scenario that is a BIV. One has, after all, rationally grounded knowledge that one is *not* a BIV. The closure principle is thus more demanding than the underdetermination principle.

What this means for our dealings with the two formulations of the sceptical argument is not straightforward, since it depends on what anti-sceptical strategy one opts for. For example, if we were to approach underdetermination-based scepticism by denying the underdetermination principle, then that would obviously suggest a response to closure-based scepticism which involved denying the closure principle. But if one opts to retain the underdetermination principle, then there would be various options available for dealing with closure-based scepticism. In any

case, the crux of the matter is that we need to be sensitive to the subtle differences between these formulations of scepticism.

In particular, notice that the difference between the two formulations of the sceptical problem reflect two distinct motivations for scepticism, even though the sceptical upshot is the same. Closure-based scepticism arises out of a commitment to what we might term the *universality of rational evaluation*, where this involves the thought that there are no in principle limitations on the scope of rational evaluation. This commitment is revealed in the fact that via closure-based inferences we can, it seems, harmlessly shift our focus from local rational evaluations to global rational evaluations, as when we query the rational basis of the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses. Underdetermination-based scepticism, in contrast, is concerned with what we might term the *insularity of reasons*, where this is the claim that the rational support that our beliefs enjoy, even in the best case, can be no better than the rational support enjoyed by our envatted counterparts. It is only with this commitment in play that the underdetermination principle can generate the advertised sceptical conclusion.¹⁶

I have argued elsewhere that we should reject both of these underlying claims.¹⁷ What is important for our present purposes, however, is that the way in which one motivates a denial of these claims is very different, as reflecting the fact that they are distinct sceptical sources leading to logically distinct formulations of the sceptical problem. It should be clear that epistemological disjunctivism is primarily engaging not with closure-based radical scepticism, but rather with underdetermination-based radical scepticism. In particular, in its defence of reflectively accessible factive rational support, and hence its rejection of the new evil demon intuition, epistemological disjunctivism is directly rejecting the insularity of reasons thesis. Epistemological disjunctivism thereby offers an undercutting response to underdetermination-based radical scepticism by arguing that the case for (S₂1) rests on a faulty philosophical picture, one that should be rejected in favour of the alternative picture offered by epistemological disjunctivism, and which is rooted in our everyday epistemic practices.

If one held that these two formulations of the sceptical problem were equivalent, and traded on a common sceptical source, then it would follow that one ought to expect a response to underdetermination-based scepticism to directly generate a response to closure-based radical scepticism also. But we have seen that these formulations of the sceptical problem are not equivalent, and hence there is a further step to be taken here. Moreover, we have also noticed that there is a logical distance between the claim that one can have the requisite favouring epistemic support sufficient to deny (S₂1) and the idea that—in keeping with disjunctive neo-Mooreanism—one is able to know the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses. Is this logical space

that epistemological disjunctivism can exploit as part of its anti-sceptical strategy?

4. THE BISCOPIC RESOLUTION OF SCEPTICISM

I think so. In particular, I think that rather than trying to resolve both of these formulations of radical scepticism by appeal to only epistemological disjunctivism, one should instead feel free to bring in resources from elsewhere. After all, given that these are two logically distinct formulations of the sceptical problem, trading on distinct sceptical sources, why should we presume that they must be afforded a common solution? Instead, my favoured treatment of these two putative paradoxes is one that is *biscopic*, where by this I mean a form of anti-scepticism which takes the dual-nature of the problem seriously, and as a consequence responds with an integrated two-pronged resolution.

We have just seen that epistemological disjunctivism is an effective antidote to underdetermination-based radical scepticism, in that it deprives this formulation of the sceptical problem of one of the key claims that motivate it (i.e., the insularity of reasons thesis, which underpins (S₂₁)). But that one can possess rational support for one's perceptual beliefs such that they decisively favour those beliefs over sceptical alternatives does not itself require us to hold that one can have rationally grounded knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses. That is, while one *might* endorse this further claim, and thereby advocate the disjunctive neo-Mooreanism outlined earlier, it is not obligatory.

Moreover, there are reasons to avoid this further claim if one can. After all, we do have a strong intuition that we are unable to know the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses, and it is obviously beneficial to an undercutting anti-sceptical strategy to respect these intuitions if possible. Furthermore, while one could commit epistemological disjunctivism to claiming that we can know the denials of radical scepticism, it is now apparent that there is a genuine option available which involves avoiding this commitment. In particular, now that we have distinguished between these two formulations of radical scepticism, and noted their logical differences, it becomes clear that there is an additional theoretical move in play here, in that the possession of the relevant factive favouring support does not itself entail that one can know the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses. The crux of the matter is that epistemological disjunctivism is directly engaging with underdetermination-based radical scepticism, and is only indirectly aimed at the closure-based formulation.

Ultimately, of course, whether it is desirable to hold back from endorsing the full neo-Moorean stance depends very much on the alternatives on offer. In the remainder of the paper I

want to outline, in broad terms, the alternative that I favour, and why I think it is more compelling than the neo-Moorean approach. This involves appeal to a Wittgensteinian hinge epistemology that draws on Wittgenstein's (1969) influential remarks on the structure of rational evaluations in his final notebooks, published as *On Certainty*. Although a hinge epistemology has often been thought to be a competitor to epistemological disjunctivism when it comes to dealing with the sceptical problem, I claim that once we understand that we are dealing with two logically distinct formulations of radical scepticism, trading on distinct sceptical sources, then it becomes apparent that they are not in conflict at all. Indeed, I maintain that these two proposals are in fact natural bedfellows, in that they are not only consistent with one another, but in fact complement each other.

One of the guiding themes of Wittgenstein's remarks on the structure of rational evaluation is that all rational evaluations, whether positive (e.g., anti-sceptical) or negative (e.g., sceptical), by their nature take place relative to a backdrop of so-called "hinge" commitments. These hinge commitments which we all have are not acquired via rational processes, nor are they responsive to rational considerations. They are, as Wittgenstein (1969) puts it, 'visceral' and 'animal' (e.g., §359), rather than being the result of ratiocination. Even so, we are optimally certain of them, and it is this backdrop of certainty that enables rational evaluations to take place. One consequence of this is that the hinge commitments cannot themselves be rationally evaluated, since they are instead what needs to stand fast in order for rational evaluations to take place. They are the hinges relative to which rational evaluation is possible.

Consider this famous passage:

[...] the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend upon the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.

That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.

But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put. (Wittgenstein 1969, §§341-3)¹⁸

Note that Wittgenstein is keen to emphasise here that it is not a mere incidental lack on our part that all rational evaluations take place relative to a backdrop of arational hinge commitments.

Rather, he wants to hold that this is how rational evaluations have to be—it is a matter of *logic*, as he would put it. It follows that the very idea of a universal rational evaluation is simply incoherent, since there could be no such thing. Far from being innocuous, the universality of rational evaluation thesis is thus simply false.

Does this mean that a hinge epistemology is committed to denying the closure principle, and thereby endorsing a highly revisionary anti-sceptical strategy? It can certainly look that way,

given how closure seems to enable fully general rational evaluations by licensing us to draw anti-sceptical conclusions from our everyday knowledge. I think this would be premature, however. The reason for this is that if we take Wittgenstein's description of hinge commitments seriously, then there is a principled way of retaining the closure principle while nonetheless denying the universality of rational evaluation thesis.

Recall that Wittgenstein held that our hinge commitments are in their nature neither acquired via, nor responsive to, rational considerations, but should instead be understood as animal, visceral etc. If that's right, however, then whatever the propositional attitude involved in a hinge commitment, it is not the kind of propositional attitude that epistemologists are interested in when they are concerned with rationally grounded knowledge. That is, it is not a *belief*, at least in the sense of belief such that it is a constituent of rationally grounded knowledge.¹⁹ After all, belief in this sense is a belief that the target proposition *is true*, and that means that it is not the kind of propositional attitude that would be unaffected by, for example, discovering that one had no rational basis for regarding the target proposition as true. But Wittgenstein is claiming that our hinge commitments embody precisely the kind of commitment that would remain even if we became aware that there was no reason for thinking the target proposition to be true, thereby disqualifying them from being beliefs in this sense. Crucially, however, the radical sceptical use of the closure principle essentially involves the acquisition of a belief (i.e., that one is not the victim of a radical sceptical hypothesis) in just this sense via the paradigmatically rational process of competent deduction. It follows that closure is simply inapplicable to our hinge commitments on at least two fronts, in that one cannot form beliefs in a hinge commitment in the relevant sense, much less form such a belief on the basis of a rational process.

This point is important since it highlights the non-revisionary aspect of Wittgenstein's proposal. The closure principle turns out to be unproblematic. What is problematic is rather the conjunction of this principle with the universality of rational evaluation thesis. Only with these two theses combined can one generate the closure-based sceptical paradox, since only then can one employ closure to draw inferences regarding radical sceptical hypotheses. Put another way, the putative inconsistent triad that we offered above with regard to closure-based scepticism is in fact not inconsistent at all, as one can endorse all three claims without contradiction so long as one rejects the universality of rational evaluation thesis. Where the closure-based radical sceptical paradox goes awry is with regard to the bridging claim that is meant to be derived from the closure principle (i.e., (S_12)), since it turns out that closure alone is not sufficient to derive this claim, as one also needs the universality of rational evaluation thesis too. In particular, it is only if one is able to plug radical sceptical hypotheses into closure-style competent deductions, and thereby come to acquire beliefs in our hinge commitments as a result, that we can generate this bridging

claim, and this possibility is ruled-out once we reject the universality of rational evaluation thesis. In this way, Wittgenstein is offering us an undercutting response to closure-based radical scepticism that demonstrates that this is in fact a pseudo-problem, in that it essentially turns on an appeal to a philosophical thesis that has been shown to be false.²⁰

In any case, the point of the foregoing has not been to convince the reader of the merits of the Wittgensteinian approach to closure-based scepticism, but rather just to explain what such a proposal amounts to. Note, however, that this approach to scepticism gains no purchase at all on underdetermination-based radical scepticism. For instance, that it is in the nature of rational evaluations that they are essentially local is entirely compatible with the idea that all rational support is by its nature insular. There is thus no straightforward route from the rejection of the universality of rational evaluation thesis to a rejection of the insularity of reasons thesis. Given the logical differences between these two formulations of the sceptical problem that we noted above, this is hardly surprising. But if we do not expect a Wittgensteinian rejection of the universality of rational evaluation thesis to offer us a solution to underdetermination-based scepticism, then why should we expect an anti-sceptical proposal that is targeted at underdetermination-based scepticism, such as epistemological disjunctivism, to be applicable to the closure-based formulation of the problem?

Here is the crux: epistemological disjunctivism and the Wittgensteinian account of the structure of rational evaluation are natural philosophical bedfellows. If one weds the former to the latter, then one has a response to underdetermination-based radical scepticism (via a rejection of the insularity of reasons thesis) that is not committed to epistemic immodesty when it comes to closure-based radical scepticism. This is because although one can have factive rational support for one's everyday beliefs, one cannot convert such factive support, via a closure-style inference, into factive rational support for one's hinge commitment that one is not the victim of radical sceptical hypotheses. And, going in the other direction, if one weds the latter to the former, then one has a response to closure-based radical scepticism (via a rejection of the universality of reasons thesis) that can also handle underdetermination-based radical scepticism. On this view, while all rational evaluations are essentially local, it is nonetheless also the case that one's everyday beliefs can be in the market for factive rational support, *contra* the insularity of reasons thesis.

If I am right that the sceptical problem trades on two distinct sources of scepticism, reflected in the fact that it generates two logically distinct formulations, then it is hardly surprising that an adequate solution to this problem will require a double-faceted—i.e., *biscope*—response. Indeed, we should expect that any attempt to derive an answer to both formulations of the sceptical problem from a single anti-sceptical thesis is bound to generate awkward philosophical consequences, just as we saw with disjunctive neo-Mooreanism. Rather than trying to extract a

treatment of both formulations of the sceptical problem from epistemological disjunctivism alone, we should instead target this view only on that aspect of the problem that it is directly equipped to deal with, and allow a Wittgensteinian hinge epistemology to handle the other aspect of the sceptical problem. I thus submit that a biscoptic response to the problem of radical scepticism along these lines is preferable to one that appeals only to epistemological disjunctivism.²¹

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NOTES

¹ I've defended epistemological disjunctivism in a number of works. See, especially, Pritchard (2012). See also Neta & Pritchard (2007), and Pritchard (2007; 2008; 2011*a*; 2011*b*; 2015*a*). For two recent symposia on Pritchard (2012), see: Littlejohn (2015), Pritchard (2015*b*; 2015*c*), Schönbaumsfeld (2015), and Zalabardo (2015); and Goldberg (*forthcoming*), Littlejohn (*forthcoming*), Neta (*forthcoming*), and Pritchard (*forthcomingb*; *forthcomingc*).

² For the key statements of the new evil genius intuition, see Lehrer & Cohen (1983) and Cohen (1984). For some useful recent discussions of this intuition, and how it is best understood, see Littlejohn (2009) and Pritchard (*forthcomingd*). Note that both epistemic internalists and epistemic externalists tend to endorse this intuition. The difference between the two is that the latter are inclined to think that there is a lot more to the epistemic standing of one's beliefs than the scope of one's reflectively accessible reasons, since other factors (which may well vary across good and bad cases), such as the reliability of the belief-forming process in play, can also be relevant.

³ See Neta & Pritchard (2007) for more on this point. See also Pritchard (2012, part one).

⁴ Note that I am here effectively equating epistemic internalism with *accessibilism*, and thereby setting to one side the alternative rendition of epistemic internalism offered by *mentalism*. I don't think anything of importance rests on this for our purposes. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere—see Pritchard (2011*b*; 2012, part one)—that epistemological disjunctivism is compatible with both ways of thinking about epistemic internalism. For the classic discussion of mentalism, see Conee & Feldman (2004).

⁵ Note that this formulation of radical scepticism is in fact much stronger than we need to generate the sceptical paradox. In particular, in terms of (S₁1), it would suffice, for example, that one *does not*—as opposed to the stronger *cannot*—have rationally grounded knowledge that one is not a BIV. Relatedly, it would suffice for (S₁2) that it follows from one's lack of rationally grounded knowledge that one is not a BIV that one lacks rationally grounded knowledge that E. Nonetheless, I have opted for the stronger rendering because this best captures the sceptical claim in play. After all, it is not as if the sceptic is pointing out an incidental lack on our parts, as if this is a lack that we could overcome if only we were more attentive, more imaginative, cleverer, and so on.

⁶ Note that in order to keep matters simple I am setting to one side those responses to radical scepticism—e.g., Vogel (1990)—which claim that we have an *abductive* rational basis for preferring our everyday beliefs over sceptical alternatives. I critically discuss such a proposal in Pritchard (2015*a*, ch. 1).

⁷ Note that here, and in what follows, we are taking it as given that one knows that E entails that one is not a BIV.

⁸ In particular, the most famous rejections of closure-style principles as a means of blocking radical scepticism—due to Dretske (1970) and Nozick (1981)—have been concerned with much weaker formulations of the closure principle, and hence do not straightforwardly apply to the closure principle as we have formulated it here. For a useful recent exchange on the status of closure-style principles, see Dretske (2005*a*; 2005*b*) and Hawthorne (2005).

⁹ Perhaps better put, it mirrors a *caricatured* version of Moore's treatment of radical scepticism (as I'm sure anyone using the term would freely admit). For what I think is the first usage of the moniker, 'neo-Moorean', in this context, see Pritchard (2002*a*).

¹⁰ See, for example, Sosa (1999) and Pritchard (2002*b*; 2005*a*).

¹¹ In contrast, an *overriding* response to the radical sceptical paradox grants that the paradox is genuine, but motivates a revisionary response that enables us to reject one of the core claims that drives the paradox. For further discussion of undercutting and overriding responses to putative philosophical paradoxes, see Pritchard (2014; 2015*a*, part one).

¹² I introduced the distinction between favouring and discriminating epistemic support in Pritchard (2010). For the application of this distinction in support of epistemological disjunctivism, see Pritchard (2012*a*, part two).

¹³ I explore the anti-sceptical credentials of disjunctive neo-Mooreanism at length in Pritchard (2012, part three). See, in particular, the dialectical points that I make on behalf of this position, but which I have elided here for reasons of space. See also Pritchard (2008).

¹⁴ As with our formulation of the closure-based radical sceptical paradox above—see endnote 5—note that this formulation of radical scepticism is in fact much stronger than we need to generate the sceptical paradox. In particular, in terms of (S₂1), it would suffice, for example, that one *does not*—as opposed to the stronger *cannot*—have a rational basis which favours one's belief that E over the BIV scenario. Relatedly, it would suffice for (S₂2) that it follows from one's lack of such a favouring rational basis that one lacks rationally grounded knowledge that E.

¹⁵ Or, at least, if they are logically distinct, then they are logically distinct in ways that aren't dialectically interesting. For further discussion of the structure of the sceptical argument, see Brueckner (1994), Cohen (1998), and Pritchard (2005*a*, ch. 4; 2005*b*; 2015*a*, part one).

¹⁶ For further discussion and defence of the idea that closure-based radical scepticism and underdetermination-based radical scepticism are logically distinct, and that they reflect two distinct sources of scepticism, see Pritchard (2015*a*, part one). See also Pritchard (2005*a*, part one; 2005*b*).

¹⁷ See especially Pritchard (2015*a*). See also Pritchard (*forthcominga*).

¹⁸ Although the "hinge" metaphor is the dominant symbolism in the book, it is accompanied by various other metaphors, such as the following: that these propositions constitute the "scaffolding" of our thoughts (Wittgenstein 1969, §211); that they form the "foundations of our language-games" (Wittgenstein 1969, §§401-3); and also that they

represent the implicit “world-picture” from within which we inquire, the “inherited background against which [we] distinguish between true and false” (Wittgenstein 1969, §§94-5).

¹⁹ There are, of course, many notions of belief operative in the philosophical literature. See, for example, Stevenson (2002) for a recent taxonomy of different kinds of belief. It is thus important to my claim that our hinge commitments are not beliefs that I have a particular notion of belief in mind (i.e., that propositional attitude which is meant to be a constituent of rationally grounded knowledge).

²⁰ For further defence of this particular rendering of Wittgenstein’s proposal regarding the structure of rational evaluation, see Pritchard (2015*a*, part two). For two recent surveys of the contemporary literature on hinge epistemology, see Pritchard (2011*c*, *forthcoming*).

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